

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**GEOSTRATEGIC SECURITY ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL**

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Core Course 5604

THE GEOSTRATEGIC CONTEXT

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**A Man's Home is His *Fortress***

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## INTRODUCTION

The above variation on the venerable (albeit not politically correct) maxim about homes being a “man’s castle” is apt insofar as it describes the perennial fortress or siege mentality that necessarily grips the nation of Israel in relationship to its fifty-three year geo-political history, and its current and projected geo-strategic context. Whereas security analysts may speak in terms of generations when speculating about a peaceful resolution to the China-Taiwan reconciliation toward the “One China” policy, or an ultimate reunification of North and South Korea, analysts are granted no such luxury of contemplating gradual time-lines drawn with respect to a peaceful co-existence of Israel with its Semitic neighbors—and most assuredly with its Palestinian antagonists and competitors. While other regions of the world also provoke U.S. security interests and the imperative for long-term, diligent, and deft diplomacy—both hard and soft—events within Israel and the Middle East often happen in pell-mell fashion and with such a cacophony of non-linear and often violent surprises, that this region virtually defies reliable forecasting.

Nevertheless, it is the purpose of this paper to organize this brief security country analysis in accordance with Core Course 5604 requirements in the following manner: (1) Provide a background of the context of the salient security

issues, for both Israel and the United States; (2) describe and analyze the challenges and opportunities that confront the United States regarding Israel—and the Middle East; (3) explicate U.S. strategy for dealing with these key issues; and (4) submit pertinent questions (as an annex) that are central to the political, military, economic and cultural dimensions under review.<sup>[1]</sup> This discussion will seek to take account of the “common points for regional analysis” provided by the Syllabus such as Context, Interests, Threats and Challenges, Objectives, Means of Influence/Instruments of Policy, and Strategy. Despite the dynamic and fluid nature of the Middle East, the analysis will seek to be less a newspaper account of current events in the region, and more a treatment of the historical and abiding factors—with their enduring qualities and challenges—that will more than likely prevail in the development of sound analyses for the next ten to fifteen years.

Finally, as practicable, the paper will attempt to incorporate a “mental map” approach to its analysis that has been demonstrated by *International Affairs* author, Martin Walker.<sup>[2]</sup> Mr. Walker has illustrated the value of assessing the various components of a country through the use of security, economic, cultural, religious, and political maps—which, arguably, overlay and blend to provide a comprehensive in-depth analysis depicting timeliness, reliability and utility in forecasting.

## BACKGROUND

It is stating the obvious that a viable security-threat-opportunity assessment of any nation-state must entail, to one degree or another, a careful study of the nation's *regional context* in order to do justice to that assessment. No nation or region of the world better underscores and illustrates this point than Israel and the Middle East. In fact, it is axiomatic that whatever the economic vitality or social conditions internal to Israel may be at any given time, equally crucial to its security concerns are equivalent factors affecting its immediate and regional neighbors. These factors combine to form an inter-dependent and intertwined web—in which one element or strand of the web cannot be tweaked without causing movement and sensation in a different area of that web. The Director of Central Intelligence, George J. Tenet recently co-released—with the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council (John Gannon)—a report that graphically illustrates this point regarding Israel. The report entitled, *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future With Non-Government Experts*, examines numerous global phenomena such as globalization, environmental and demographic trends, human rights, economic and industrial issues, and so forth. Of particular note is the experts' consensus involving the Middle East, with particular impact on Israel. “Global trends from demography and natural resources to globalization and governance appear generally negative for the Middle East. Most regimes are

change-resistant.”<sup>[3]</sup> The report projects rising prospects for demographic pressures, social unrest, religious and ideological extremism, and terrorism directed both at local regimes (Israel) and at their Western supporters (United States). Additionally, the report contends that nonlinear developments such as sudden economic downturns—particularly in those oil rich states engaged in strategic rent—could foster spontaneous outbursts in states already made politically raw and socially fragile by high unemployment rates and increasing cohorts of young, restive adults. The vast numbers of unemployed young males predominate as one of the primary internal threats to the social fabric of many of the states in the region—those most vulnerable to the siren song of political and religious extremism.

The above, fast-forward projection for the region is integral to an appreciation of any background discussion that must ensue. On background, it is also important to note that the Jewish state has never known a period of complete peace. It has fought five wars against the Arabs—in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. The West Bank Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon have dominated Israeli security concerns for decades. Because of Israel’s lack of strategic depth (geographically speaking)—which will be addressed later in greater detail, territory can never be traded for time when confronting an armed adversary.

Moreover, Israel faces substantial internal challenges. Immigration of Jews

to Israel from around the globe, but more recently from former Soviet-bloc nations, has exacerbated social and political tensions, often the cause of unwanted and dangerous distractions from its external threats that remain in both historical and future perspective. Parenthetically, to survive outside threats, Israel—with unrelenting and generous assistance from the U.S.—has made a point of possessing the most potent fighting force in the Middle East, and has kept Arab states and the Palestinians in check through a strategy of deterrence based upon military vigilance and its officially unacknowledged nuclear capability.

Nevertheless, Israel's domestic burden—with an ethnically diverse Jewish population—exacerbated by ruling two million often bellicose and disaffected Palestinians within its borders, and punctuated by the recurring specter of *intifada*, strains both the nerves and the means of maintaining its security and other equally important national interests. The October War of 1973 was a chilling reminder that Israel can be surprised: presumably caused by an intellectual breakdown that begs more of a psychological analysis than a politico-military one. In that conflict, Israel's military (Moshe Dayan) and political (Golda Meir) leadership was brought down due to the near collapse at the hands of Anwar Sadat's Egypt and its *sub rosa* war preparations, albeit with inferior military equipment and weaponry.

To be sure, every confrontation facing Israel translates into, quite literally,

a struggle for survival. However one constructs a “mental map” of Israel, it will always include a fortress/siege mentality. This is due in large part to its ethnic history as a nomadic civilization that was able to maintain its religious identity and cultural memory through the *Diaspora* and the twentieth century holocaust. It can also be attributed to, for example, influential, abiding and fervent support from domestic lobbying efforts among Jewish citizens within the United States. This phenomena can best be summarized from the Congressional Quarterly’s overview of the Middle East: “... Washington’s perception of its interests in the Middle East, the strong support of American Jews for Israel, and the support they are able to garner for Israel in the political arena would appear to ensure that Israel and the United States *will remain close, regardless of who is in power in either nation.*”<sup>[4]</sup> Subsequent sections of this paper will amplify Israel’s security issues, and U.S. interests and policy positions regarding Israel and the Middle East. In general, however, the comity of interests maintained between the U.S. and Israel since the United States’ *de facto* recognition of Israel’s creation in 1948 has weathered several political/military storms. And, despite such incidents such as the Jonathon Pollard spy case (who passed U.S. secrets to Israel), as well as other conflicts of priorities and interests involving the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), there remains an unapologetic, mutual commitment that permeates and pre-conditions all other considerations involving the Middle East.



Testament to this reality is the fact that U.S. foreign aid extended to Israel exceeds that of any other nation on the planet; with Egypt ranked second as a beneficiary of U.S. largess. If money follows national interests, there can be no doubt that Israel and the Middle East remain vital national interests of the United States.

### **The Three Geo-political Theories of Security: “Location, Location, Location”**

## **ISRAELI CONTEXT & CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE UNITED STATES**

Another corollary to the “location” mantra would be: “a picture is worth a thousand words,” when sketching the portrait of Israel’s geo-political landscape. Consider this: Israel, about the size of New Jersey—created on the former territory of Palestine (with 94 percent of its population predominately Sunni Muslims)—is sandwiched between the Mediterranean Sea and a crescent of Arab nations; Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan and the West Bank to the east, and Egypt and the Gaza Strip to the southwest. Further, Israel is located within missile-striking distance of several other regional belligerents such as Iran and Iraq. With not quite six million citizens—many of whom cannot qualify for service in its armed forces by reason of their Palestinian and/or other ethnic/political/religious background—Israel’s economy is the most robust in the

region, further escalating the sense of envy and disenfranchisement within the Middle East. Totally devoid of natural resources of any commercial value, and shaped by its isolation from the markets of neighboring Arab states, Israel has developed a remarkable, advanced industrial and high-tech economy that provides its citizens the highest standard of living in the region—with a per capita income of \$17,500; unemployment hovering around a politically manageable eight percent; and, a healthy GDP of \$96.7 billion (1997).

Bordered by a cumulative 90 million Arabs in the contiguous states necessitates enormous Israeli defense expenditures that, in part, explain its national debt and modest GDP growth of 4-7 percent over the last decade. At best, U.S. interests in the region will strive for the continuance of a “cold peace” of Israel with its neighbors due to the projections that only limited social, economic, and cultural ties will circumscribe Israel’s relations with its Arab neighbors. In this region, like many others of the world, history matters. Because international attention will only intensify in the Persian Gulf in the coming years, due to the increasingly important source of energy resources to fuel the global economy, old rivalries among core states—Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran—will not only pose future conflicts, but also potentially destabilize fragile relationships that almost inevitably rebound against Israel. Because normalized relations of Israel with its neighbors are sporadic at best, any disputes in the region enhance the

prospects of rekindling ingrained strife and isolation for Israel. Israel's "maps" of geography, economy, security, population, and religion (as well as ethnic/culture) are inextricably linked one with another. And, Israel's domestic situation can never be appraised independent of conditions among its Arab neighbors—creating a mosaic of competing and often irreconcilable proportions.

For these geo-political and demographic reasons, the aforementioned (*Global Trends 2015*) report soberly forecasts: "With the exception of Israel, Middle Eastern states will view globalization more as a challenge than an opportunity ... a key driver for the Middle East over the next 15 years will be demographic pressures, specifically how to provide jobs, housing, public services, and subsidies for rapidly growing and increasingly urban populations. By 2015, much of the Middle East populations will be significantly *larger, poorer, more urban, and more disillusioned*. In nearly all Middle Eastern countries, more than half the population is now under 20 years of age."<sup>[5]</sup> The socio-economic challenge to U.S. policy for the region is staggering, yet requires constant and unwavering engagement of the highest diplomatic order.

Beyond regional demographics, changes to the political leadership within the region also portend both danger and opportunity for U.S. engagement. The Institute for National Strategic Studies, under the sub-heading of *Growing dissatisfaction with corrupt and inaccessible rulers*, summarizes its viewpoint:

“Most Middle Eastern rulers are 60 to 70 years of age. Half the populations are under the age of 20. Except for Israel and Iran, most states have authoritarian regimes, or at best, limited democracies. Out of 19 regimes, the military plays a prominent role in nine. Two rulers claim ‘divine right’ as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad—King Abdullah II of Jordan and King Mohammed bin Hassan of Morocco. Even states with parliaments—including Egypt, Jordan, and Kuwait—have groups that complain about the government’s lack of accountability and transparency. All governments in the region are experiencing pressure to reform.”[\[6\]](#)

The *Strategic Assessment 1999* lists five critical U.S. interests in Israel and the Middle East:[\[7\]](#) (1) Controlling proliferation of WMD; (2) The challenge of ensuring freedom of the seas and the free flow of oil; (3) The difficulty of protecting Israel; (4) The complexity of maintaining a regional balance favorable to U.S. interests; and (5) The difficulty of promoting political and economic liberalization. This paper’s brevity precludes a thoroughgoing exposition and critique of each stated interest, and their respective implications. As compelling and daunting as these interests are, the list may not be entirely complete without emphasizing U.S. interests in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian homeland issue—to include a growing Arab-Islamic population/lobby within the United States. The Temple Mount impasse symbolizes throughout the region the long-

term irredentist impulse of the Palestinian Authority (PA) with its Israeli landlord. Following Mecca and Medina, Jerusalem's Temple Mount represents the third most holy site for Muslims around the world. If this pan-Islamic value among a billion-plus Muslims is not recognized, Israel and the United States will continue to face prolonged Arab resentment in the region—and among Muslims globally. Therefore, until this single issue is resolved, the Temple Mount will provide pretext for continued anti-Israeli rhetoric and a presage for sporadic, truculent behavior in the region. This is complicated by the sad reality of the *modus vivendi* status of almost two generations of Palestinians raised in refugee camps who have experienced very little of what it means to participate responsibly in a civil society. Political reconciliation represents only the first step to the reduction of tensions between Israel and the PA in an attempt to reduce Arab *casus belli* against Israel.

Further, with Muslim Americans now outnumbering Jewish Americans, another decade may find that a Muslim lobby will discover its political voice as Muslim Americans work their way, inexorably, into America's social, economic and political institutions. Evidence of this occurred most recently with former Michigan senator, Spence Abraham, becoming the first Arab American ever to serve as a member of the President's cabinet.

### **“Old Enemies and Lukewarm Friends”**

## U.S. STRATEGY TOWARD ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

As someone who knew a few things about political survival, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote: “It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order, this lukewarmness arising partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the laws in their favor; and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it.”<sup>[8]</sup> Machiavelli captures the essence of U.S. challenges within the Middle East. All efforts at intra-governmental/social reform and inter-governmental reconciliation take place in the context of historical enmity, generations of anguish, suspicion and bloodshed, worsened by the prospect of doubtful regional stability—but made all the more necessary because of the growing, not lessening, of importance of the Middle East to the rest of the world. What happens in the Middle East bears directly on two other key areas of concern for the United States: China and larger Asia; and an expanding Europe—from West to East.

A “psychological map” could indeed be fashioned in order to translate and interpret the effects of fear, distrust and apprehension—as well as hope among a

few—upon U.S. endeavors to maintain and balance Middle Eastern regional stability with Israeli safety and territorial integrity. In this vein, it is incumbent upon the strategist to review and maintain the continuity of U.S. involvement within the region while, at the same time, searching for new paradigms and metaphors that unlock heretofore-untried tools for peace and stability. It is therefore instructive to review U.S. strategy that emphasizes what has been called “The Middle East Peace Process” as the lynchpin for peace, stability and prosperity in the Middle East.<sup>[9]</sup> The U.S. must maintain and enhance its role as the key architect—and effective broker—in sponsoring and forging peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel and Syria; strengthening political ties between Israel and Egypt; and, Israel and Lebanon. Simultaneous bilateral efforts between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt *et al* in the region require unabated engagement, particularly regarding issues of oil flow, availability of water across national borders, environmental issues within the region, population and refugee shifts—to name only a few of the issues that serve as both ends and means toward peaceful (normalized) end states within the Middle East. However, it must be recognized that every nuance of security enhancement within Israel (as Israel understands security, i.e., more territory as a buffer) has the opposite and shattering affect of unhinging the “security map” of a neighboring Arab nation—and the reverse holds true as well.

In the final analysis, a major recommended change of *modus operandi* for the United States is to alter its propensity to demonize political leaders and military/clerical dictators within the Middle East with whom it may disagree at any given moment. Indeed, there is much to hold in disdain when evaluating their coarse use of power in order to maintain political control. There may be short-term psychological benefit to “demonization” when the U.S. seeks to marshal domestic public support for a particular policy of economic sanctions or armed conflict (in their unilateral and coalition forms). However, the long-term necessity of engaging in diplomatic and on-going dialogue is truncated if not obliterated with such tactics. Political and military personages within the Middle East enjoy far greater staying power than U.S. political leaders. Hence, like it or not, realism dictates the possibility of overtures to the Saddam Husseins, Khomeini-types, and Mu’ammar al-Qadhafi. Although friendships may change, U.S. interests have remained remarkably consistent over the last half-century. The three core objectives of the United States—Enhance America’s security; Bolster America’s economic prosperity; Promote democracy & human rights—can and must be integrated as part of the regional strategy for the Middle East.

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**ANNEX:**

**KEY QUESTIONS CENTRAL TO THE POLITICAL, MILITARY,  
ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL ISSUES AFFECTING ISRAEL AND THE  
MIDDLE EAST**

(1) Given the generations of enmity and violence between the Israelis and Palestinians—and yet acknowledging the prolonged and intense efforts at a peaceful resolution of the disputed lands—to include access to and control of the Holy Mount—what steps or programs are being taken or can be achieved with respect to the reconciliation of the youth of both entities? What educational and social orientations can be initiated to bring about dialogue between and among the traditional belligerents? Can religion and the religious institutions on either side play a role in mediation and reconciliation? Or, is it likely that another generation will grow up hating and killing one another—and inculcating their animosity to yet another generation?

(2) It has been said that four obstacles to the peace accords remain that

discourage Arabs from engaging in normal relations with Israel: 1) Israel's refusal to recognize the right of the Palestinians to establish their own independent state in the West Bank and Gaza; 2) Israel's insistence on retaining Arab East Jerusalem; 3) Israel's refusal to withdraw from the Golan and South Lebanon; and 4) Israel's refusal to subscribe to the policy of a nuclear-free Middle East. Progress in negotiations have eliminated or tempered three of the four obstacles. Is the fourth one a deal-breaker for peace?

(3) Is there a viable, peaceful and hopeful secession scenario envisioned for post-Arafat Palestinians? In the pan-Arab community, what Arab nation, potentially, would be most instrumental in brokering a non-violent transition of power within the Palestinian community?

(4) Assuming that economic growth and prosperity within the region would enhance the prospect of peace and stability, is there envisioned the development of an economic rapprochement of Israel with Egypt—much like free-trade areas involving Israel and Jordan?

(5) Much attention regarding outside intervention into the Middle East has focused on the United States. However, to what extent will NATO and an expanding European Union (EU) have an affect on Israel and Middle Eastern countries; particularly the Euro-Mediterranean arena?

(6) It is believed by some observers that Egypt holds the key to the ultimate success of Israeli/PA negotiations in particular, and to Middle Eastern peace in general. If true, what are the instruments of influence available to Egypt in these complicated and tortuous deliberations?

(7) Much attention is paid to the differences, dissimilarities and grievances between Judaism and Islam—a “clash of cultures” as some have described it. What are the traits of both major religions that could be used as building blocks and common ground for peace in the region?

(8) What accounts for the strategic partnership between Israel and Turkey? Trade? Water? Economic and cultural exchange? What are the common interests binding each to the other? Can this arrangement be extended to other Arab-Islamic states?

(9) For Israel, what are the key trends in the Middle East that cause Israel both hope and apprehension regarding future stability and peace? And, how are certain transnational trends, such as WMD proliferation, terrorism, organized crime, drug proliferation, globalization, and post-Soviet migration to Israel affecting Israel's future?

(10) How has U.S. involvement in the Middle East both enhanced and complicated Israel's security?

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- [1] Core Course 5604 Syllabus, "The Geostrategic Context," Academic Year 2000-2001 (Spring); The National War College, p. v-vii.
- [2] Martin Walker, "Variable Geography: America's Mental Maps of Greater Europe," International Affairs, Volume 76:3 (2000), pp. 58-62.
- [3] "Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future With Non-governmental Experts," <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/globaltrends2015/377188.gif>; released 13 December 2000. p. 11.
- [4] "The Middle East," (9<sup>th</sup> Edition) A Division of Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2000, WASH DC, p 276.
- [5] Opcit; p. 45.
- [6] Strategic Assessment 1999—Priorities For a Turbulent World; Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University (1999), WASH, DC, p. 103.
- [7] Ibid., p. 115.
- [8] Niccolo Machiavelli, "The Prince," trans. Luigi Ricci & ed. Christian Gauss (A Mentor Book, 1980) pp. 49-50.
- [9] "A National Security Strategy For A New Century," The White House, (Dec 1999), p. 42.